



## ***Executive Summary***

# **Wes Coast Fire Management Area Fire Protection Plan**

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**This report summarises the findings contained in the Fire Protection Plan for the West Coast Fire Management Area 2019 review.**

The purpose of Fire Protection Plans is to identify and prioritise bushfire risks in the landscape and strategically identify work that can be done to mitigate that risk.

Fire Protection Plans have been prepared for each of the ten fire management areas in Tasmania in accordance with the requirements of the *Fire Service Act 1979*. These plans were developed for the first time in 2014 in a collaborative effort by members of Fire Management Area Committees made up of local stakeholders.

The objective of the Fire Protection Plan is to effectively manage bushfire related risk within the West Coast Fire Management Area in order to protect people, assets and other things valuable to the community.

In preparing the Fire Protection Plan, a tenure blind approach to strategic fuel management was taken. The identification of areas and communities at risk from bushfire together with the identification of areas of potential strategic value for undertaking risk mitigation activities was undertaken by Fire Management Area Committee members without regard to land tenure/ownership.

In taking this approach, Fire Management Area Committees have recognised that strategic fuel management needs to occur across public and private property boundaries in order to be effective.

The management of bushfire related risk is not the sole responsibility of any one land manager or agency. It is a shared responsibility of the whole community.

The tenure blind approach to bushfire risk mitigation planning as undertaken by Fire Management Area Committees creates opportunities for collaboration between public and private land managers and owners and promotes the development of a centrally coordinated bushfire risk mitigation program.

### **West Coast Fire Management Area Background**

- The West Coast Fire Management Area covers just over 1.9 million hectares and has an estimated residential population of 44,550 people.
- The Fire Management Area extends westwards from the township of Heybridge on Tasmania's north-west coast to Cape Grim on the West Coast and

southwards as far as Davey Head. The fire management area encompasses Robbins Island, Hunter Island and Three Hummock Island in Bass Strait.

- A substantial proportion of West Coast Fire Management Area is formally reserved with larger reserves within the planning area including part of Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair National Park, Franklin – Gordon Wild Rivers National Park, the Southwest Conservation Area (which all form part of the Western Tasmania World Heritage Area) and Savage River National Park in the north of the planning area.
- Vegetation in the West Coast Fire Management Area in particular is well adapted to fire and in recent times the area has experienced a high frequency of fast moving bushfires which have burnt out large areas of the Fire Management Area.
- Whilst the West Coast Fire Management Area contains a significant percentage of low flammability vegetation types it also contains even larger amounts of highly flammable vegetation in the form of buttongrass moorland, sedgeland, rushland and peatland as well as scrub and heathland.

### **Key findings for the West Coast Fire Management Area**

- Approximately 85% of land within the West Coast Fire Management Area is public land and 15% is private/freehold land. The majority (69.6%) is Parks and Wildlife Service managed land.
- The management of bushfire risk on leasehold and unallocated crown land (particularly land containing abandoned mining leases) presents a challenging problem in the West Coast Fire Management Area.
- A total of 5.5% of the fire management area was identified as being at extreme risk from fire under current fuel loads.
- Whilst the West Coast Fire Management Area contains a significant percentage (25%) of low flammability vegetation types it also contains even larger amounts (31%) of highly flammable vegetation in the form of buttongrass moorland, sedgeland, rushland and peatland as well as scrub, heathland, native grass and highland treeless vegetation.
- 24% of the West Coast Fire Management Area (465,187 ha) has been categorised as treatable (using fuel reduction burning). The remaining 76% of the fire planning area (1,449,163ha) has been classified as untreatable in terms of conducting fuel reduction burning however field inspections will be required to properly determine whether areas are suitable for fuel reduction burning.

### **Bushfire threat in the West Coast Fire Management Area**

- The fire season in the western region of Tasmania extends from October to April. The extended period occurs due to the flammable characteristics of the moorland buttongrass and scrub vegetation complexes within the Fire Management Area.
- Statistics indicate that whilst the peak of the fire danger period in the west is in February, the month of January continues to support the highest incidence of fire

starts. This correlates with the period of highest visitor use in the area together with a greater frequency of thunderstorms in the area in summer.

- 15.5% of the Fire Management Area is noted as having been subject to fire at least once since fire records started being kept. Less than 6% of the fire management area has been subject to more than 2 or 3 fires at the same location.
- The leading causes of fires for the West Coast Fire Management Area (other than planned burns which accounted for 21.3% of fires) include lightning strike ignition (35.6%) and a range of human causes (accidents, arson, campfire escape, escaped burns).
- Analysis of existing records indicates that arson is a significant issue for the West Coast Fire Management Area, particularly for PWS managed land.

### **Special issues for the West Coast Fire Management Area**

- Abandoned and new mining leases within the West Coast Fire Management Area represent a major fire risk for nearby communities if they are not managed or they have absentee owners/managers.
- Gorse affected land represents a high fire risk to some communities (particularly around Zeehan). A long term gorse removal program has now been disbanded, further increasing the risk and requiring follow up action.

### **Bushfire risk analysis results for the West Coast Fire Management Area**

Computer based fire behaviour tools were used to conduct an initial broad scale assessment across the West Coast Fire Management Area to identify communities most vulnerable to bushfire. A more detailed assessment was then conducted by members of the Fire Management Area Committee.

Tools that were used by the Fire Management Area Committee to identify communities vulnerable to bushfire include:

- Consultation of Local Government and Emergency Services Risk Registers
- Local knowledge from Tas Fire Service District Officers and brigades
- Consultation with Tasmania Fire Service Community Protection Planners and Community Development Officers
- Expert opinion of fire practitioners
- Identification and consideration of existing and past fire management actions, plans and incidents

### **High risk areas for bushfire**

Bushfire risk assessment modelling results indicate that some areas of highest bushfire risk identified for the West Coast Fire Management Area are located around the settlements of Strahan and Queenstown in the central western part of the West Coast Fire Management Area as well as areas around Mt Read and scattered patches across the north and north eastern part of the West Coast Fire Management Area.

As at October 2017 a total of 5.5% of the fire management area was identified as being at extreme risk from fire under current fuel loads.

## **High risk ignition point locations**

Computer fire simulation modelling indicates that within the West Coast Fire Management Area bushfire ignition points of potential concern under current fuel loads are located:

- to the north west of Strahan
- to the north west of Queenstown
- to the north west of Zeehan
- in the more heavily populated areas of the north coast including south west of Burnie and west of Wynyard
- south of Smithton

## **Community Risk Assessment**

Following group analysis and discussion of the preliminary risk assessment results (detailed above), together with input gathered from local knowledge, 'at risk' communities were then prioritised by members of the West Coast Fire Management Area Committee in terms of requiring mitigation actions.

Mitigation activities may include:

- Fuel reduction burning
- Fire trail and fire break construction/maintenance
- Mechanical fuel reduction through slashing, trittering and mulching
- Community education
- Other prescribed activities specific to community needs

Some of these activities can be implemented in a relatively short time frame whilst others will need careful planning and consultation with the relevant stakeholders which will need to be done over a longer time frame.

## **Community Risk Assessment results**

The following communities were identified as being at risk and having priority for bushfire risk mitigation activities within the West Coast Fire Management Area:

- Zeehan
- Strahan
- Sisters Beach
- Arthur River
- Port Latta

## **Other at risk groups**

Consideration was also given to a number of community groups and locations within the West Coast Fire Management Area (including camping areas surrounded by flammable vegetation) that may contain people at risk from bushfire. The following groups and

locations were considered to be at risk due either to their isolation, close proximity to heavily vegetated areas or low mobility:

- The Dogs Home above Emu River Valley
- Emu River Valley residents
- Cam River Valley residents
- Recreational campers and tour companies
- Crayfish Creek Caravan Park
- Montagu Park Camping Area
- Macquarie Heads camping area
- Corinna wilderness lodge/settlement
- Rosebery

The level of preparedness of residents and campers in these areas to respond to a bushfire event is not known. As not all areas, communities and structures are defensible in all circumstances the safest option for these groups may be to leave early rather than to stay and defend. These groups and locations are likely to already have been given consideration in municipal emergency management plans and associated risk assessments.

### **Areas of strategic importance within the West Coast Fire Management Area**

Reducing fuel loads in strategic locations has the potential to modify fire behaviour and reduce impacts from bushfires. Areas of potential strategic importance for bushfire risk mitigation within the West Coast Fire Management Area were identified and are shown below. These areas were identified through a process that utilised and combined local knowledge and computer modelling. Fire Management Area Committee members with specific fire expertise and knowledge across the area contributed to the identification of both the communities at risk and the broader strategic areas for potential mitigation activities.

The following areas were identified as having potential strategic importance for the West Coast Fire Management Area:

<b>Potential treatment area</b>	<b>May provide protection for</b>
Fern Glade Conservation Area & Emu River Valley Reserve (south Burnie)	Havenvue residential area (Burnie), the Wivenhoe industrial estate and the Lion dairy production factory (old Surrey Road)
Gorse affected land around Zeehan	Zeehan township
Strategic Fire Trails around Queenstown	Queenstown
Broom affected land around Waratah township	Waratah township
Strategic trails around Rosebery	Rosebery township

These potential strategic areas will require further detailed field inspections in order to properly determine their suitability for fuel reduction.

Other mitigation activities to reduce the risk of fire for these communities may include:

- Fire trail and fire break construction/maintenance
- Mechanical fuel reduction through slashing, trittering or mulching
- Community education
- Other prescribed activities specific to community needs

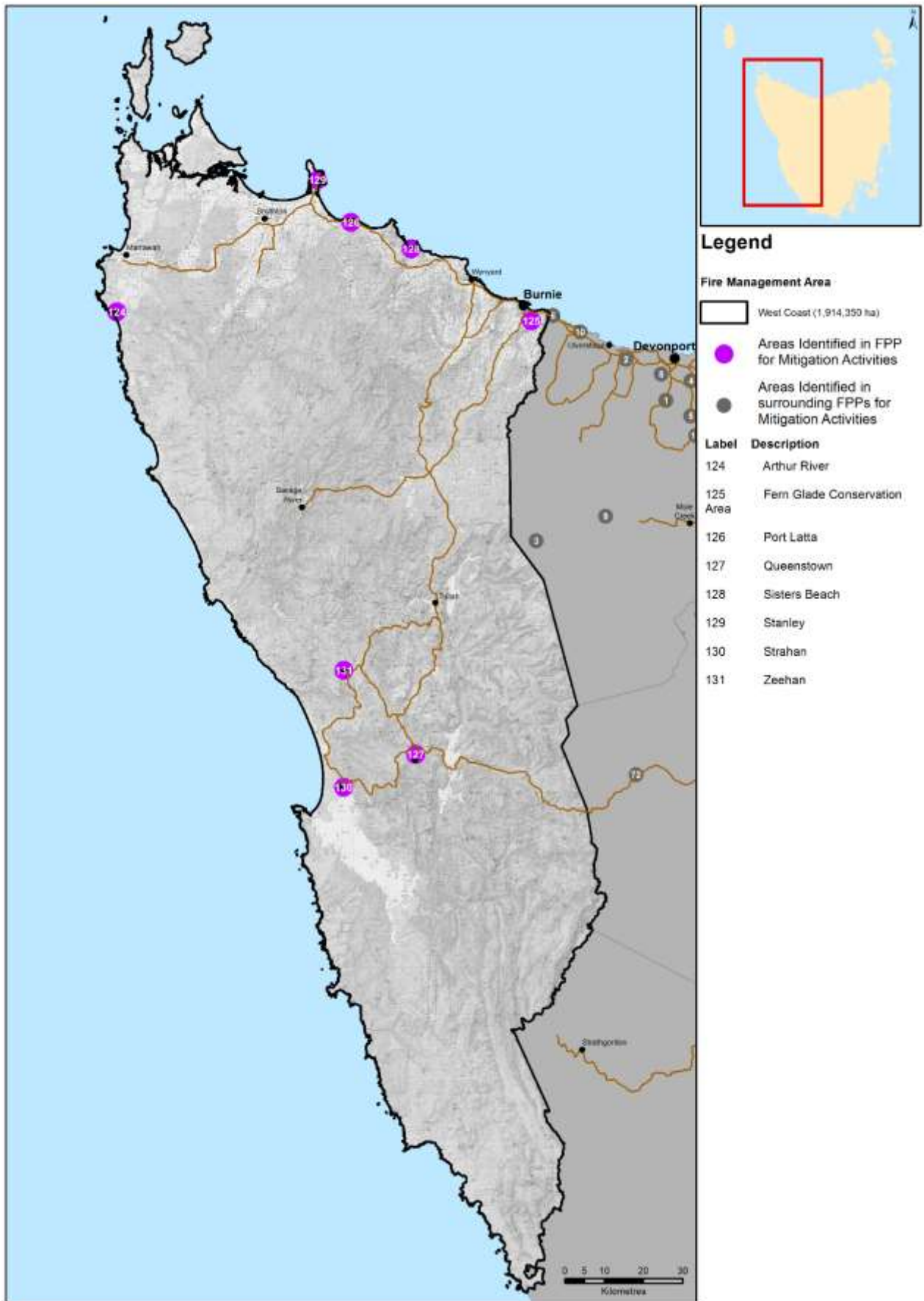
Some of these activities can be implemented in a relatively short time frame whilst others will need careful planning and consultation with the relevant stakeholders which will need to be done over a longer time frame.

Maps showing the location of communities and areas at high risk from bushfires, together with a map showing areas of potential strategic importance within the West Coast Fire Management Area are contained below.

- Map 1 - Areas identified in the West Coast Fire Protection Plan for mitigation activities
- Map 2 - Community Risk Assessment results
- Map 3a - Areas of potential strategic value for bushfire risk reduction
- Map 3b - Areas of potential strategic value for bushfire risk reduction

For further information please contact  
State Fire Management Council on **(03) 6226 8533**  
email: [SFMC@fire.tas.gov.au](mailto:SFMC@fire.tas.gov.au),  
or post: GPO Box 1526, Hobart 7001. [www.sfmc.tas.gov.au](http://www.sfmc.tas.gov.au)

Map 1 - Areas identified in the West Coast Fire Protection Plan for mitigation activities

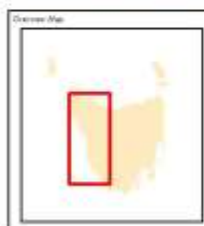
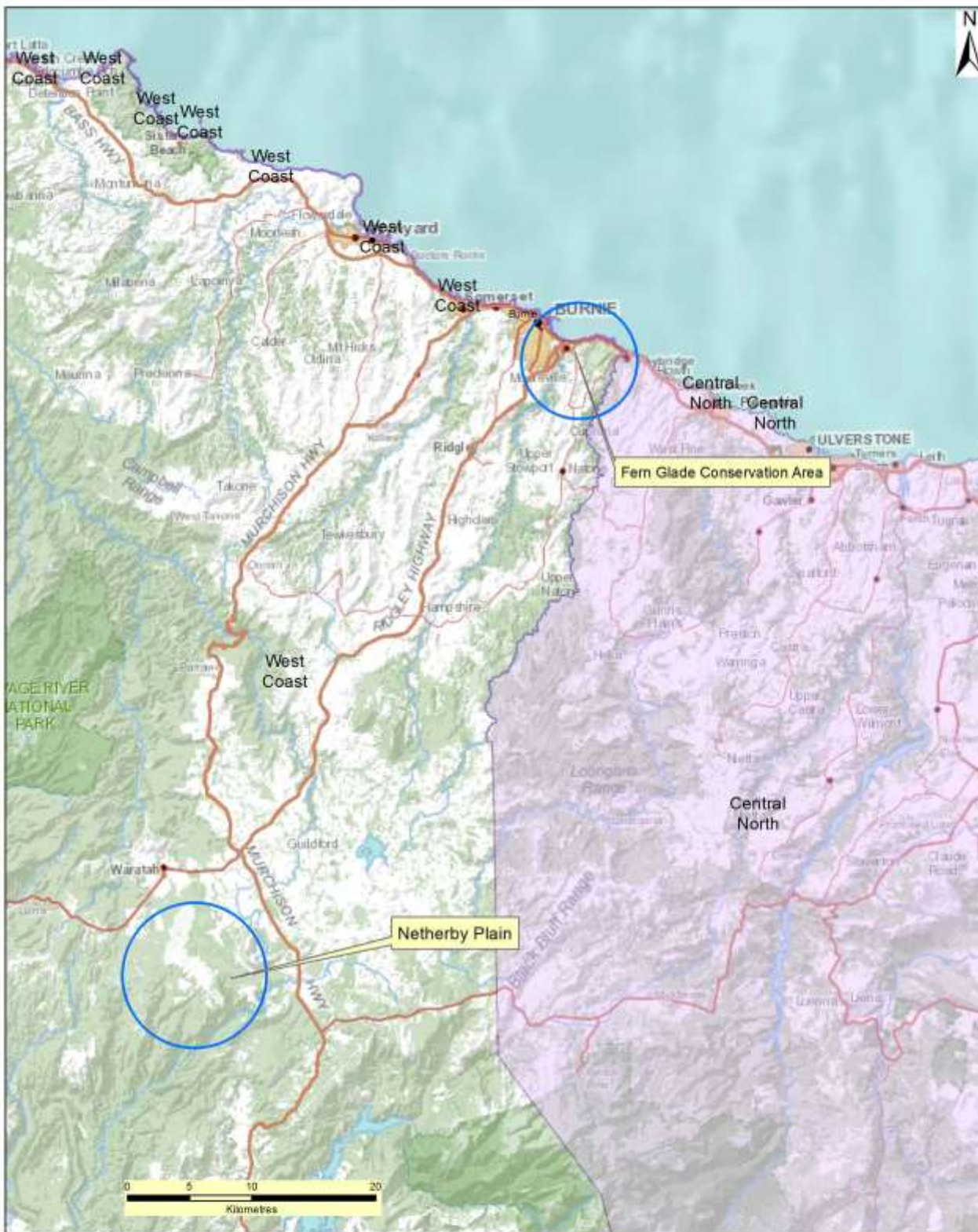


Map 2 - Community Risk Assessment results





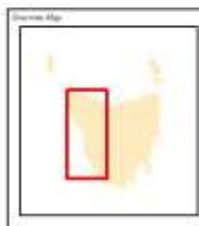
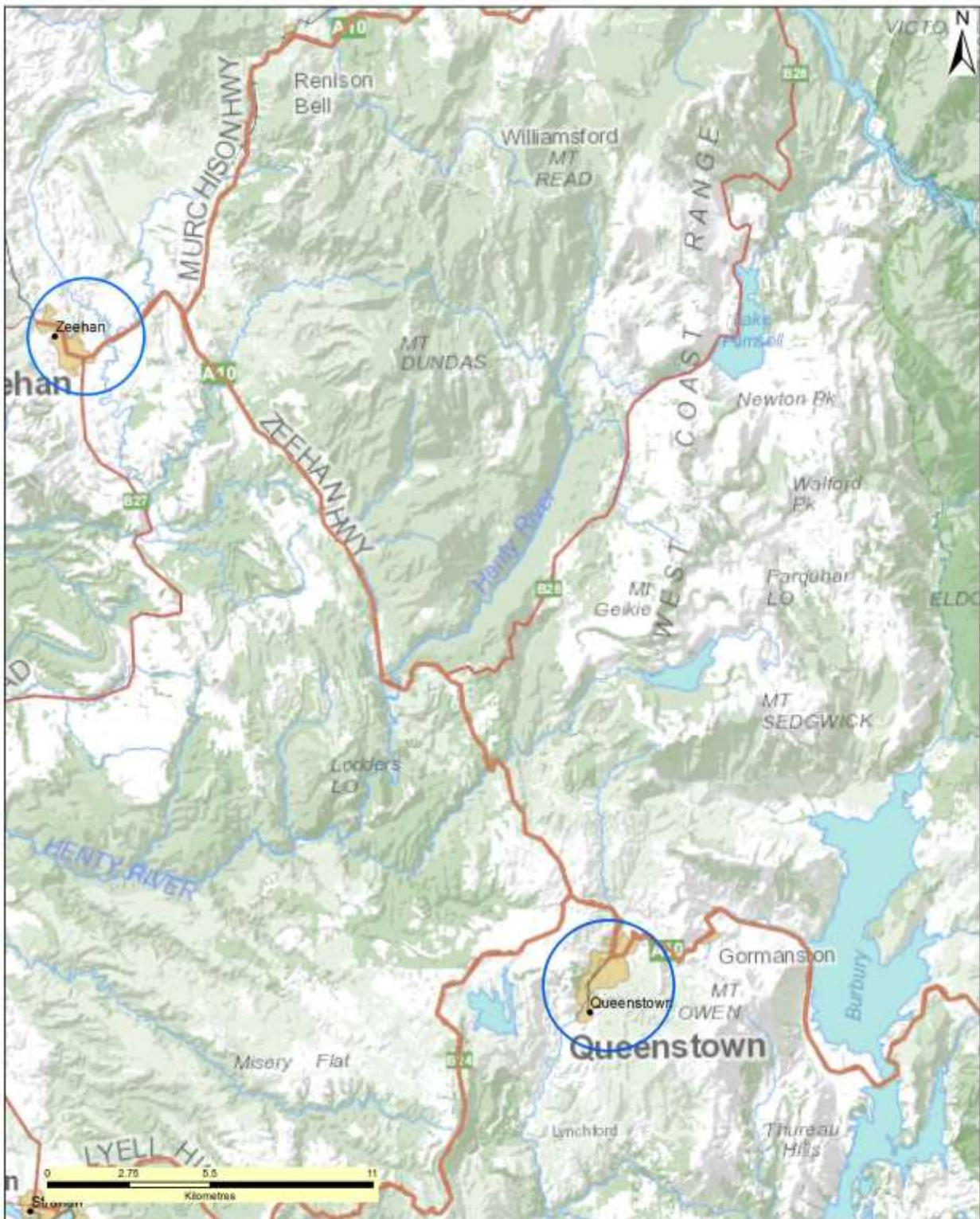
Map 3a – Areas of Potential strategic value for bushfire risk reduction



General locality of  
 areas of potential strategic value  
 for mitigation actions  
 Western FMAC

Map Title: WCP/PLATE Author: Insp Print Date: 20/03/2019 Print Time: 11:28:54	Edition: QDA 199 Population: 1,000,000 Coordinates: Spheroid: GDA UTM, MGRS Zone 52
Scale: 1:50,000      File Name: 2387-0000-002	

Map 3b - Areas of potential strategic value for bushfire risk reduction



**Areas of potential strategic value  
for mitigation actions  
Western FMAC**

<b>State Fire Management Council</b>	
Map Title: 13051 PLACE	Scale: 1:50,000
Author: map	Projection: Transverse Mercator
Prod Date: 02/03/2014	Coordinate System: GDA 94 / 3146 Data 94
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